



**DRB Memorandum
257 Central Street
1-16-2019**

Date of meetings project reviewed: 12-5-2018, 12-19-2018 & 1-16-2019

12-5-2018

DRB Members in attendance: Holly Ben-Joseph (Chair), Peter Darlow (Assistant Chair), David Honn, Kim Montella, Emilie Ying (Planning Board Liaison), and Janet Adachi (Board of Selectmen liaison);

Proponent Team attending: Daniel Gannon, Stamsky and McNary; Elise Bracer Stone, Architect
Guests: Terra Friedrichs

Plans Reviewed:

Site Plan, November 30, 2018

Architecture Set A-1 through A-4, April 20, 2018,

12-19-2018

Members in attendance: all members above except Emilie Ying and Janet Adachi.

Proponent Team attending: Daniel Gannon, Stamsky and McNary, Zur Attias, Developer
Guests: Terra Friedrichs, Wayne Friedrichs, Rene Robins, Debra Simes, Josh Spero, Scott Kutil

Plans Reviewed:

Site Plan, November 30, 2018 with existing trees over 6" caliper located on site

Architecture Set A-1 through A-4, April 20, 2018, revised to eliminate bonus room in response to DRB comments from first meeting

Locus Plan showing proposed building footprint in approximately 6 block area, at request from DRB
Kim Montella, DRB member, brought photos of the existing trees on the site

1-16-2019

DRB Members in attendance: Holly Ben-Joseph (Chair), Peter Darlow (Assistant Chair), David Honn, Kim Montella, Emilie Ying (Planning Board Liaison), and Janet Adachi (Board of Selectmen liaison);

Proponent Team attending: Daniel Gannon, Stamsky and McNary; Elise Bracer Stone, Architect; Zur Attias, Developer

Guests: Terra Friedrichs, Wayne Friedrichs, Josh Spero, Joseph O'Donoghue

Plans Reviewed:

Same site plan and architecture as shown on 12-19-2018 meeting.

The proponent showed pictures of homes that are in the immediate area of the proposed home, and showed several examples of other homes with square footages similar to the proposed building.

This parcel has been formed by a by-right lot split and is .345 of an acre; a single family home can be located on this site by-right. The lot is in the village residential zone (VR), at the corner of Pearl and Center Streets. The site borders the West Acton Village (WAV) district, and exactly across Pearl is the Christian Science reading room, which is currently vacated and may be redeveloped in the future. The site is surrounded by the historic district on three sides. The Acton Farmers Market is located on Pearl, and any proposed curb cuts could interfere with the market. Needless to say, this is an important site to the West Acton Village both visually and for the community.

The proponent is proposing to request a special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals to build a two-family structure on the site. The building archetype is duplex-style, with two garages at the center of the structure, and a residence at either end. The building's styling and detailing are well done and appropriate for the historic district, but the double garage at the middle is suburban in style. The proposed building is sited facing Pearl Street rather than Central, and is on the east setback line of the site, putting it very close to the adjacent single family home, which is a single story bungalow. The proposed building faces Pearl Street, and two curb cuts are proposed on Pearl for driveway access. Each home has one garage space, a second car will park in the drive behind the garage or on the street. The septic field is at the west end of the property, (along Central Street), and has a top of mound at 3-1/2 feet above the surrounding sidewalk. A stone wall is proposed to retain the mound. The finish floor of the homes is raised 3-1/2 feet from sidewalk, so that they are the same height as the top of septic mound. The grade around the homes slopes down to the surrounding existing grades at approximately a 1:4 slope, which is noticeable. Most of the existing trees (mainly mature pines and hemlocks with 14" to 18" calipers) along Pearl Street would have to be removed and also no existing trees are shown along the east property line as remaining. However in discussing this with the proponent it was determined that many of the trees along the east property line could remain and these trees were added to the Site Plan.

The following are comments in more detail on the proposed building and site plan:

1. The forms and detailing of the duplex are appropriate for the historic neighborhood, but the connecting of the two-family in a duplex style fashion, (with garages at the center connecting the two homes), is not a style found in the historic district.
2. The proposed building's front façade along Pearl is very long, around 93 feet. Most homes' facades in the neighborhood are much shorter, with frontages of about 30-40' in length, and are sited to extend deep into the site. Because of the lot-split and two-family there is no room for this traditional siting. The proponent showed homes in the area with similar square footages, but the FARs are much lower because they sit on larger sites, and the higher density does not fit in with the historic neighborhood.
3. At the DRB's request at the first meeting, the proponent has reduced the square footage (SF) of the two-family by about 400/unit, (800SF total), by removing bonus rooms above the garages and the DRB is pleased with this. However, the proposed building is still 8,400 SF. The DRB notes that the sizes of the of the rooms are generous for the Acton market and could be made smaller and still be attractive to purchasers. The DRB recommends to further reduce the size of the two homes.
4. The proposed construction maxes out allowable building area on the site; the proposed building and septic field abut the setback lines except in one place, and the building has a FAR of .55. The West Acton Village district has an allowable FAR of .4, but most residences in the area have average FARs of .2. The .55 FAR for the two-family is greater than the allowable FAR and more than double than the average residence in the area. The DRB recommends that the building be reduced in size to no greater a FAR than .4 so that it has a similar size to its neighbors.
5. The proposed siting of the building is not centered on the site, but is pushed to the east property line to make room for the septic field at the west of the site. The proposed building is very close to the adjacent neighbor's home on Pearl Street. This home is single story bungalow with a small footprint and massing, and is also sited close to this property line. In addition, no existing trees were shown to remain between the two properties in the first presentation plans, however some trees have been maintained on the revised drawings. Guests mentioned that there are still more mature existing trees that aren't being shown; the proponent has offered to check this and get back to the DRB.
6. The DRB believes the proposed project could be greatly improved by to flipping the building and septic field on the site. This would achieve the following:
 - a. Provide a greater separation between the proposed duplex (two-family) and the existing

single story home.

- b. The duplex would be closer to Central and the larger buildings on Central Street – Theater III and the West Acton fire station, grouping it with buildings closer in massing and scale.
 - c. The driveways would be closer to the corner, thereby eliminating the need to remove all of the existing trees on Pearl (which are important for shade for the farmers market), and more of the trees on the east property line could be saved which would provide a buffer to the existing single story bungalow.
7. Deborah Simes representing the Acton/Boxborough Farmers Market expressed concern over the proposal for driveways on Pearl. She said that Pearl Street was selected for the Farmer’s Market not only because it is in the village and its central location, but that Pearl Street is one of the only streets in Acton with only one residential driveway (these homeowners have access to another drive off of Windsor Ave), so that there is no conflict with residents trying to drive to their homes while the market is active. The market works from 8:30 to 2:00, every Sunday in the summer months. The proponent has offered to write a restriction in a covenant signed by both prospective homeowners of the duplex. However, this would need to be verified if it is possible by Town’s attorney.
 8. The DRB questions the practicality of two large homes only having a single car garage. (one tandem parking space is available in front of the garage). This doesn’t make sense in this market to the DRB and to a Realtor on the DRB. We all agreed that too much was being proposed for a small site. Smaller homes would make sense with a one-car garage.
 9. The architectural detailing is interesting and high quality and very suitable for the area. The DRB approves of the deep wrap around porches and use of 5/4 trim boards.
 10. The DRB approves of using a natural stone wall to around the site to retain the septic mound so that it will not be an unnatural ‘hump’ in the yard.

While the DRB appreciates the proponent’s effort to fit the proposed duplex into the surrounding historic neighborhood through the use of period detailing, wrap around porches and stone walls, the site layout with the bulk of the building set at the east property line, the higher than typical FAR of the neighborhood, the two driveways on Pearl Street, that will be in conflict with the very popular Sunday Farmer’s Market, and the removal of existing trees are problematic enough that the DRB cannot support the project in its current layout and sizing. The DRB believes a two-family could work on this lot and in fact could be attractive if the recommendations listed above are heeded. In fact, there will be more design control and a far better outcome for the neighborhood with a suitably designed duplex rather than a single family, by right structure that will not be subject to review which could result in an out-of-scale, suburban style home completely inappropriate and damaging to the West Acton village area.

The DRB would like to review any new proposal before providing a positive recommendation. It would be helpful to show an elevation of the proposed building with elevations of the adjacent existing homes on Pearl and Central Streets to compare massing.

The DRB thanks the proponent for presenting their project at three meetings and their willingness to make changes to the building design and to work with the DRB. However, the DRB still firmly believes the project will be improved by flipping locations of the proposed building and septic field. The DRB looks forward to working together with the proponent for an outcome that benefits the proponent, the Town, and one that complements the Village of West Acton.

Respectfully Submitted
Design Review Board